A NUISANCE.

From The Somerville Journal.

Of all the pestilential bores
That make this life a state
Of constant torment, most I dread
The man who's always late.

He never keeps his word, but lets
His friends anticipate
His coming for a weary while,
The man who's always late.

He says he'll come at half-past six,
You wait till long past eight,
And haven't seen a sign of him,
The man who's always late.

With stale excuses, glibly made,
He tries to palliate
His tardiness, but you don't love
The man who's always late.

He never cares for other's plans,
"Oh, hang them! let them wait!"
He says aloud, or to himself,
The man who's always late.

But some day punishment will fall
On him, as sure as Fate,
And he'll be sorry that he is
The man who's always late.

When he comes up, all out of breath,
To old St. Peter's gate,
St. Peter'll say, "You can't come in,
This time you're much too late."

A TUMBLER OF MILK.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LORDS AND LADIES."

(Concluded.)

How fast flew Sybil's feet up the broad oaken staircase when one bright frosty morning it was announced that a box—the box of boxes—had arrived from town! It had been taken to her dressing-room, she was informed, where it was already being opened; she waited to hear no more.

The lid was off, in spite of her haste, ere she was at the door, and the first sight that met her enraptured vision was that of glossy folds of white satin festooned over with silvery veilings and wreaths and trails of shining blossoms, being drawn forth from rustling depths—a dream of beauty never to be forgotten.

Sybil stood still and clasped her hands. Never had she beheld anything more pure and exquisite—and it was to be for her. A sigh of ecstasy escaped, a soft murmur burst from her parted lips. And then, to be sure, the fairy robe itself was not all. There were besides tiny, sparkling, beaded, white satin slippers, such slippers as Cinderella's prince might himself have fallen in love with; and there were a pair of the longest, softest, most delicately perfumed gloves, gloves that would certainly reach to Sybil's elbows, if not beyond; and best, because least expected of all—for Lady Georgina's orders had been lavish, but had for this occasion been intrusted to one person only—something still longer than the gloves, still softer, still more dainty; something that unrolled and unrolled, and grew more and more bewitching with every turn, until finally resolved into the most beautifully embroidered silken stockings that heart of maiden could desire, with, oh! joy of joys, no hidden horrors, no discomforting secrets thereto attached. Her cup ran over. It seemed as if all at once every thorn had been extracted from her roses. If the first view was ravishing, the next step was still more enchantingly novel and important. The whole contents of the box must be tried on without delay; two attendants lent their aid, Lady Georgina, eyeglass in hand, looked on, and only the young lady's now-acknowledged young-ladyhood prevented the worthy Colonel's being present also. As it was, he hung about in readiness to confer on any debatable point or to pronounce upon the whole.

"Are you sure they fit? Do they quite fit?" earnestly demanded the mother, as the small feet in their wondrous new casings were displayed before her. "Sybil, my precious, do not scruple to tell me exactly how they feel. Are they easy? Are they comfortable? Not too tight anywhere? Not too high in the heel, nor too low in the instep, nor too narrow across the toes? Do they pinch you in the slightest? Do they hurt anywhere? Say if they do at once, my love; they can be sent back and fresh ones ordered if——"

"They are very nice indeed, thank you, mamma." Sybil's young face was aglow all over.

"They look very nice certainly, but still if they are not comfortable—"

"Indeed, mamma, they could not be more comfortable."

"And the patience the bit thing has wi' a' her mamma's fidgets and fancies, and her no bein' satisfied with naethin, is a sicht to see," cried the old nurse, Scotch to the backbone, in her heart at this. "Puir bit cratur! she canna be let be e'en afoot a best goon for the birthday, but it maun be 'Sybil, my bonnie, it's bound to pinch ye some gait.' Aweel, her mamma means nae ill, but the folks is few and far atween that could thole it!" Sybil was now being arrayed in the satin folds.

"Charming!" cried Lady Georgina, for once caught in a womanly snare. "Charming!" and for full a minute she said nothing more. But all too soon anxiety was at work again, and over and over again had it to be repeated that every detail was as it should be, that the waist was not too long, nor the collar too high, nor the sleeves too tight. Was the skirt at least not rather narrow? Could Sybil move, and breathe, and recline at ease? Would she run no risk of tripping over her lace in front, or of being entangled in the train behind? Would those high-heeled slippers— But here Lady Georgina actually brought herself to a standstill, and dangled the eyeglass nervously from her hand. Now the truth was that "heels" were not only hers but Colonel Latimer's inveterate and openly proclaimed aversion, and long and loudly had they waged war with them on Sybil's behalf.

"Manacles, distortions, deformities," had been the Colonel's cry. Were it once to come to his knowledge that any living creature had dared to attach to the feet of his precious child, or rather to her shoes their obnoxious component parts, speech would not have sufficed for his wrath, and no power on earth would have prevented his sending back the pretty, shining, sparkling little apples of discord without the delay of an instant. But Lady Georgina was not a man, nor a soldier. She looked at her daughter, and, as we have said, suggestion and inquiry alike melted away. She could not do it. Of Sybil's own innocent delight, of her pride of displaying her small self so transformed and illumined to the sympathetic household, of the secret hopes to which the present hour gave rise within her modest bosom, fluttering and thrilling like that of a frightened bird beneath its unwonted sensations, we must not now pause to speak. Suffice it to say that all went well, and that the day of the dinner party drew on.

Of this in itself the young girl had no dread. By nature Sybil was fond of society, easily pleased, readily amused, and disposed to believe that the most of those she met were as kind, and good-humored, and benevolent, as they appeared to be. People were always kind to her; and from having been so much in the company of her elders, the current topics of the day were neither found to be devoid of interest nor above her comprehension; nor would she have shrunk from being questioned and appealed to, had she been allowed to reply without the reply being discanted upon, and dissected piece by piece. Might she but have talked as others talked—but why hark back to the old grievance? There was one person at least with whom Sybil Latimer was never miserable, never upon the tenter-hooks, and with him—a sigh of satisfaction escaped whenever she thought of it—with him she was to pass the greater part of the eventful evening. Accordingly there only remained one subject for conjecture and anxiety now to feed upon, only one terror had still at times the power to keep sweet slumber from her eyelids. That haunting spectre was—a tumbler of milk.

Every evening at eight o'clock, when Sybil sat down to make her usual light and easily digested supper during her parents' more solid and protracted meal, a tumbler of milk would be placed at her right hand, and it was one of the laws of the Medes and Persians in the old Colonel's household that for no reason and under no circumstances was that tumbler of milk ever to be omitted. In his eyes the nutritious draught was the chief support, the very backbone as it were, of Sybil's fragile existence, and for this reason it had long been one of her worst enemies. In vain had Lady Diana urged that milk, in conjunction with other food, was by no means the harmless and healthful diet he supposed. His hand had been raised on the instant, and his tone had been heightened also, and as he had declaimed and expounded, with invariably the same result—incredulity and a shrug of the shoulders on her part, renewed and inflamed obstinacy on his.

In other respects the meal had been, after infinite deliberation and debate, advanced with advancing years; so that from the earlier plate of rusks and butter, it had now been turned into a minute helping of fish, with perhaps a potato in gravy to follow (neither soup nor meat was supposed to suit), but whatever there was or was not, the one thing needful, in the eyes of those who had not themselves to drink it, was the tumbler of milk, and the reason for its being so, with all the usual additional explanations and discussions, was given con amore to anybody present who inadvertently laid himself or herself open to receive them. The point now was, would that ghostly tumbler appear to confront and overwhelm poor happy Sybil on this one glorious evening of her hitherto sunless life? She dared not inquire, had not the courage to awaken memories that might be dormant on the subject. The risk was too great.

Supposing, just supposing, that silence might mean a tacit concent to the absence just for once of the degrading relic of the nursery, would she not have herself to thank, if by any ill-timed inquisitiveness she were to bring down evil on her own head? Provided a discreet reserve were maintained on the other hand, it was quite on the cards that Barlington—Barlington, who was the soul of propriety and as severe an upholder of etiquette as his mistress herself—would take it upon himself to forget.

George and Thomas, the two underlings, would take their cue as in duty bound from their leader, and consider it impossible that anything so homely could appear at the gorgeous banquet. Could she but have hoped that her parents would have shared the feeling? Any such hope, however, at least with regard to the lynx-eyed Colonel, was vain as vain could be; it all depended on his not remembering and not perceiving. But what a thread to hang upon!

As the hour drew nearer the matter loomed more important. At first it had been one of many cares, an anxiety amid numerous anxieties, but as these gradually subsided and at length there had remained only the dreaded tumbler of milk and nothing besides, it attained a magnitude which not unnaturally dwarfed the lesser sources of gratification. Then came listening, watching, and straining to discover, if possible, whether or no everything had been said, any order given. She did not think so. She could not find any sign of its having been the theme of remark in any way. On the afternoon of the party fortune favored her yet the more; she was able to slip unperceived into the dining-room, all decked out and almost complete for the evening, and one hasty glance at the place which she knew had been prepared for herself sufficed to show the now joyous and triumphant little maid that no tumbler of milk was expected there. Her glasses—one, two, three,—were duly placed and arranged like those of other people. She asked no more. Oh, the joy of robing and trimming, of alternately dallying and hurrying over her toilet as eight o'clock approached! How early did Sybil repair to her room, and how fondly did she stroke and smooth the satin, hold the trailing garlands up to view, peep at the fairy slippers, stretch and powder and uncover the many buttons of the long gloves! Ready long before she really need have been, there was every minute something to alter, to rearrange, to improve. Now it was an ornament here, now a ribbon there, now a buckle to be adjusted, now a lock of hair to be fastened.

"Come, my love;" Lady Georgina herself at the door. "Come and enter the drawing-room with me, and—and—God bless you, my darling!" whispered the poor fond mother, with the water rising to her eyes. For once she had not a single fault to find. For once Sybil neither shrank nor shrivelled beneath the eyes turned upon her as she walked up the great saloon. Sir Robert Dovercourt was already there—she was glad he was there. He looked at her—she was glad he should look. He spoke to her—and she was proud to be spoken to.

"Looks very well for once, does she not?" whispered Lady Diana, on the alert as ever; "looks as she ought to do, and not as she ever does do—or at least has done before. Now" (this was all to Sir Robert, who stood near), "now, you remember what I told you. Oh, don't stand staring at Sybil, Sir Robert; we can all see that she is a new creature in that nice new dress, but have your wits about you. Don't allow this chance to pass. Listen; if you find that your partner is to sit close to either parent, just get into a wrong place and don't be got out of it." Sir Robert's honest face flushed up with humor and comprehension. She saw she could depend upon him.

Then the move to the dining-room began, and he made for Sybil's side. "I am to have you to myself, Sybil. That is jolly."

"Oh, yes;" quite ready to assent.

"Did you know before me?"

"Oh, yes." Sybil always spoke the simple truth.

"How did you know?" proceeded he, however. "You had no business to know. Now, supposing you had wanted to have some one else?"

"Well?"

"You would have made your mother throw me over."

"Oh, no," said Sybil earnestly.

"Oh, yes you would."

"Indeed I should not; I never should have thought of doing so."

"Why not?"

"Why, I never ask mamma anything;" and the house of cards on which he had begun to build fell over on the instant.

"Oh," said Sir Robert, showing in his tone something of this; "oh, I had hoped—but no matter. I see how it is. Your mother arranged it all, and you had no voice. Girls do have a voice in such matters sometimes, don't they?" He sighed, and shot a side glance. At the same moment his well-tutored eyes discerned that if his place were on the left side of Lady Georgina, at least he was not obliged to know as much. The places were not named.

"I think we might sit here;" and the sturdy baronet seized the back of a chair almost in the middle of the table. "Eh? What?" as a footman officiously hurried forward to correct the mistake. "Eh? Oh, we shall do very well here. No, never mind; we'll stop where we are, thank you," in decided accents, and Lady Diana's laughing eyes applauded the speaker from the opposite side.

"Delightful!" thought Sybil, "delightful!" "Now," pondered she presently, "now I am quite safe, even from the tumbler of milk. Papa cannot see me at all, and mamma is not likely to be watching. If mamma were but in her place—" And the next moment Lady Georgina was in her place.

A momentary hesitation, a disturbed glance as she beheld what had happened, but that was all. Lady Georgina Latimer was far too well-mannered a woman to cause a scuffle at her own board and among her own guests; there had been a blunder, but she could not help it; if young Dovercourt had been stupid enough to mistake his instructions, he must take the consequences; he had been told where he was to go, and he ought to have done as he was bid; she could not pull about her dinner-table in order to give him his proper precedence, and so he must be shown; he must now sit where he was, and he would know better another time.

Apparently Sir Robert was content in his disgrace. His broad, red, healthy, jolly face had never looked more replete with satisfaction and good-humor. It was an ugly face—an ugly face according to commonly accepted canons—but somehow it was one that everybody liked and that no one was ever sorry to see. More than one among the ladies present would cheerfully have exchanged the elegant, faultlessly attired youth at her side for Sybil's rough-and-ready partner, who was too much of a man, and too big a man altogether, to give his clothes, or his manners, or himself in any way very much of his attention, and had in consequence the whole of it to bestow on his companion. It was well known that Sir Robert could afford to defy even Lady Georgina. Lucky Sybil!

Now Sybil felt her luck to the very bottom of her young heart. She was, it is true, almost a child, but she was almost a woman also. The birthday party in itself, with all its attendant joys and immunities, would have satisfied the one-half of her nature, but it was the other half which now experienced a keener, sweeter pleasure. A woman's hopes and fears and flutterings were beginning to stir within her breast, and she was conscious of an emotion other than she had ever known, and one before which all else paled and faded. Formerly a kind word or look or merry confidence from her old friend had almost certainly been evoked by painful circumstances, or had been followed by some embittering element. Even on the few occasions when it had not been so, when all had gone well, it had struck keenly home to the child's lonely heart that he, who was so much to her, probably scarce yielded more than a passing friendliness, a sort of compassionate goodwill, in return. Of late, to be sure, Sir Robert had seemed to care a little more, to seek her out a little more, but never, never in his life had he looked at her as he did now. And as for his talking to any one else! Certainly he had on his other side the dullest dame in the county, and one whom even he could not awaken nor invigorate. But still he should have tried. Surely the poor lady should not have been allowed to wade through course after course with only the most perfunctory and interjectionary and spasmodic of observations from the gentlemen on either side of her. As a rule she could have depended on Sir Robert Dovercourt, who had the character of being the kindest-hearted and least discriminating talker in the world—a young fellow so happy in himself that he brimmed over here, there, and everywhere, regardless on whom the sunbeams fell. Was it possible that even Sir Robert could fail for once?

Sir Robert actually did. There he sat, talking, laughing, eating, telling good stories, cracking good jokes, and sipping good wine, the merriest of the merry, but with ne'er a thought of duty nor of conscience. Poor woman, she never quite forgave him. And she never but believed to her dying day that Sybil cast a glamor then and there over the simple young man, who otherwise would have given no more his heart——But we anticipate.

Let us return to the tumbler of milk. It was, as we have said, absent, and, in Sybil's eyes, conspicuous by its absence, even from the place which should have been hers. She felt now doubly secure. There was no chance of Lady Georgina's being reminded, nor of Colonel Latimer's reminding himself. The dinner was in full swing, and both were—must be fully engrossed. She need no longer dread her dream of bliss being rudely broken in upon. She might give herself up to it unchecked, play the woman. She would, indeed, content her appetite with a mere thimbleful of the delicious soup (Sybil was fond of soup), whose irresistible odor issuing from the kitchen had assailed her nostrils throughout the day; she would also be on her honor in regard to the fish, decline the sauce, and avert her eyes from the tempting entrees. All of this was nothing; to refrain from every delicacy in or out of season was nothing (indeed, she had of her own accord promised as much in rehearsal, overjoyed to do so, and thus foresee an exemption from outward reminders);—but now even desire to feast upon forbidden fruit was at an end, subdued by an all-powerful rival. Sir Robert could eat and drink and make love all at once—for Sybil it was enough only to receive the last. She asked no more.

"All due to me," chuckled Lady Diana, from her vantage ground opposite; "all due to my poking up that dear, nice, stupid fellow, who is the very man for Sybil, but would have had no more the wit to find it out for himself than to fly. Now he will go ahead as though he was in the hunting-field. He will never stop until he has run her in, as he would say. Oh, yes, I can see you doing it, Sir Robert; you have started now and are well off I should imagine, by your looks—and hers. Poor child, what a good time she is having! But what is the matter? What are people looking at? What is Sybil crimsoning at? Some folly of my senseless prig of a brother-in-law, I'll answer for it. Oh, but that is really too bad," and, in spite of her indignation, the lively lady gave way to a mirth she could not restrain. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" for Lady Diana had an acute sense of the ludicrous. "O, poor Sybil, poor Sybil! Ha! ha! ha! And, oh, dear! Sir Robert's face! Ha! ha! ha! And, oh my goodness! what is Sybil going to do? Oh, that incurable idiot, Barlington, to go and present poor Sybil before us all with a great, horrid, invalidish tumbler of milk!"

Well might she say, "What is Sybil going to do?" Poor Sybil! One moment before, and she had never been so happy in her life. In her fancied security she had been prattling and jesting, and drinking in the exquisite draught of ardor unconcealed, with which Sir Robert's eyes and tongue at once presented her, bending her fair neck the better to give ear to the voice of her enchanter, expanding like a flower in the warmth, responding to the sunshine. And now! It was only a tumbler of milk, but with it the serpent entered into Sybil Latimer's paradise. That the blow should have fallen thus! That she should have been struck down just when she was treading the celestial heights, when she was inhaling the intoxicating incense, being lured to rapture by the bewitching music!—when, and oh, reader, deign to think this pitiful, and deign to pity—when she was at last free, unfettered, untortured, and at peace!

No word did Sybil speak. Words would have availed nothing; protests, entreaties, rebellion itself even, would now have been all too late; the deed had been done, the sight had been seen, the disgrace was ineffaceable. Full in the view of all, and uncomely even in the eyes of him who bore it, there was the large white tumbler on its shining tray, and in the accompanying sentence, "By master's orders, miss," the hapless victim read her doom afresh. It happened, moreover, that at the moment a silence fell upon the company, so that her own pale consternation, Sir Robert's mute, round-eyed amazement, and Lady Diana's "My goodness!" were lost upon nobody, and indeed directed to the one point the looks and intelligence of such as might otherwise have been engaged.

"There is your milk, Sybil." Like a dim echo came her father's voice from the bottom of the table. Sybil almost shuddered.

"There is your milk," repeated he; and then, horror of horrors, she heard, she was sure she heard, the "Sybil suffers so much from etc., etc.," which was the inevitable prelude to revelations and confidences. Of all things Colonel Latimer piqued himself upon being a judicious and thoughtful parent; the present opportunity for proving himself to be one had been too much for him, and his "Miss Latimer's milk" had been delivered in a tone that admitted of no remonstrance. He was now explaining his theory on the subject to the matrons on either side. But Sybil, what befel her? How did she comport herself? How did she endure the luckless moment?

"Milk, by Jove;" cried a voice in her ear. "Milk, I declare! Is it for you, Sybil? Is that your fancy?" (her fancy, poor child!) "Well, upon my word, it is a splendid idea," pursued Sir Robert, talking comfortably away; "looks jolly, and tastes first-rate, I'll answer for it. I never heard of anybody's taking milk at dinner before. I am sure I don't know why they shouldn't though, if they like it; I daresay it tastes uncommonly nice; I——" But here the good-humored young voice suddenly died away, the blue eyes dropped, and over the speaker's frank open face a queer look stole. "By Jove!" he might have been heard to whisper to himself beneath his breath. For all down Sybil's scarlet cheeks the tears were streaming.

Of course she should have helped it; of course you and I would have helped it; we would have sunk into the earth, given up the ghost upon the spot, rather than committed such a terrible, irremediable offence against les convenances; but perhaps, on the other hand, we have not had our spirit subdued and our strength broken by years of tutelage amounting to martyrdom, and we have not been, as it were, caught, and caged, and thrust back into prison again, just when we had spread our wings in one rapturous flight beyond. This was what had happened to my poor little heroine, and beneath the stroke she sank her head and wept.

"Oh, my goodness! my goodness! my goodness!" Lady Diana's laugh from very horror froze upon her lips. She was no great hand at propriety herself, but this went altogether beyond her. "Oh, my goodness! that child has done for herself now, at all events," muttered she, as grave as a judge. "Who would have believed Sybil did not know better? Well, my good sister and brother, you have only yourselves to thank for this. I hope you like it. All I can say is, I am thankful it is no child of mine who is making such an exhibition of herself. It will be the talk of the neighborhood, and everyone will say they have weakened the girl's intellect with their folly. Oh, Sybil, for goodness sake stop!" continued she, almost aloud. "It is too dreadful, and Sir Robert——" But she raised her eyes at the moment, and forgot to finish the sentence. Sir Robert had taken possession of the milk.

"Sybil?" No answer. "Sybil," said he again. A low sob. Then a faint "Yes?"

"You do not want this, and I do," pursued the speaker, softly; "let me keep it;" for she had put out her hand. "I want to take it from you, I want your leave to drink it for you; but"—(every one else was now talking very fast, and Lady Diana's voice rose above the rest in her gayest, liveliest accents)—"but," continued the young man, dropping his own tones lower and lower till even the one ear for which they were designed could scarcely catch them, "but it would be too great an honor; I have no right to ask it, I have no claim to put myself forward as your knight, unless"——(the talking around was still loud, fast and furious)—"unless," murmured Sybil's companion very low, "you will yourself give me the right. Sybil, dear Sybil! may I do this, and everything else for you from this time? May I——," and he stopped, and held the glass of milk in his hand, gazing into her face. "Do you understand?" he said. Understand? Her very heart was bursting.

"I want to fight all your battles for you, to take all your troubles on my shoulders; to care for you, and have you for my own," fumbled good Sir Robert, not knowing very well in what words to put the feeling with which his great chest was heaving, but no whit reluctant nor embarrassed neither. "Only say one word, won't you? Because, you see, I must have one word, or else—— Oh, then, never mind about it," for the chances of obtaining what he sought were obviously small, and it became prudent not to press the point. "No never mind," he went on, "I ought not to have spoken now, only—only that I can't help it. And if you will just—I say, I may drink it, may I? No, don't look up and down the table; neither your father nor your mother has anything to do with this, no one has anything to do with this, except you, you, you yourself. You, and only you must give me my answer, Sybil. I won't take it from any one else. I only ask for a sign, or a look. I shall know what you mean, and you will know what I mean, it is between ourselves. But if I am allowed to drink this—am I to be allowed? . . . Sybil?" . . . Again he paused, and there was no evading nor mistaking that pause.

"Sybil?" Her head bent lower. "Is it to be 'Yes,'" he whispered.

"Yes."

Sir Robert raised his face, and fronted the assembled guests triumphantly.

"Something has happened," cried Lady Diana to herself. "Something has surely happened. He's in earnest. I swear he is in earnest. He has got that wretched milk in his hand, and—good heavens! he looks as though he were going to drink it!" He drank it to the last drop. "And now," he cried exultingly; "and now?" She had no words, but neither did he need them. One moment his hand sought hers beneath the table, and he knew that henceforth she would refuse him nothing. . . .

And Sir Robert maintained afterward, and maintains to this day, that it was the tumbler of milk that did it all.

"For, by Jove! I had always thought Sybil was an uncommonly nice girl, you know," he averred joyously; "and I was struck all of a heap by her when she came in that evening, all dressed out so beautifully, you know. But then, that was one thing, and falling in love was another, you know. I don't know—mind you, I only say I don't know that I had exactly thought about falling in love with Sybil just then. Of course I should have done it sooner or later; I couldn't have helped myself; but if it had not been for that tumbler of milk—by Jove! I am glad that I have not to drink such beastly stuff every day—though to be sure I did not grudge drinking it, and I would do it again for Sybil any time—of course I would. Only I hope to goodness never to see poor Sybil in that plight again. I can hardly think of it now. I felt as if I could have murdered somebody. That poor child! But I tell you what, she is never going to cry any more, she has promised me that. Bless you, she is as happy as the day is long, now. And she tells me everything that she does. I know how to get it out of her in spite of all her saying "I am afraid I ought not to tell you," and that sort of thing. That is all nonsense. If I am to be her husband, I shall have to hear it some time, so I may as well begin at once. 'Tis as good as a play. I know all about the coddling and the fussing, and the queer coats and hats, and the old nurse sitting up in the next room till after she is asleep at night,—oh, by Jove, the whole thing is delicious. Take care of her? Of course I'll take care of her, but it will be in another way, mind you. It shan't be by making her blush up before everybody, and nipping her in the bud at every turn. It shan't be by treating her like something between a fool and a baby. I know what I'm about. Why, Sybil is a new creature already, and as for her parents——" He gulped down the comment in his throat. "Oh, it's all right, of course," he concluded cheerfully; "they are very good sort of people, and we shall get on first-rate. I bear them no grudge, nor yet does Sybil, for that—that—that tumbler of milk."—(Cornhill.

SHAKESPERE'S "DREAM."

ITS COURSE UPON THE STAGE.

THE MEANING OF A BEAUTIFUL FANTASY—THE FATHER OF ENGLISH BURLESQUE.

Preface to Mr. Daly's Prompt-Book of Midsummer-Night's Dream.

Because William Shakspere, who lived in this world only fifty-two years, wrote so much within that brief period, and, furthermore, because he wrote with such transcendent genius and ability, it has pleased theoretical and visionary observers to declare that he never wrote at all. Shakspere viewed alone, they maintain, is a miracle, and therefore an impossibility; but Shakspere and Francis Bacon, rolled into one, constitute a being who is entirely natural and authentic. The works of Shakspere and the works of Bacon present, indeed, almost every possible point of dissimilarity, and no point of resemblance. The man behind Shakspere's plays and poems and the man behind Bacon's essays and philosophy are absolutely distinct from one another, and as far apart as the poles. The direct and positive testimony of Shakspere's friend and professional associate, Ben Jonson—a close observer, a stern critic, a truth-teller, a moralist, not over-amiable in his commentary upon human nature, and neither prone to error nor liable to credulity—tells the world, not only that Shakspere wrote, but in what manner he wrote. The assumption, implied in the Bacon theory, that a poet capable of writing "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "Lear," and "Othello," either would or could, for any reason whatsoever, wish to escape the imputation of their authorship, is obviously absurd. The idea that Shakspere, hired by Bacon to father those plays, could for a period of years go in and out among the actors and the authors of his time, and so impose upon their sagacity and elude their jealous scrutiny as to keep the secret of this gigantic fraud, is simply ludicrous. The notion that the man who wrote Shakspere's poems—and these, undeniably, were the work of William Shakspere—was the kind of man to lend himself to any scheme of imposture is repudiated by every intimation of character that those poems contain; and the same may rightfully be said of the man who wrote Shakspere's plays. The fact that the plays, which these theorists would deny to Shakspere's pen, are entirely, absolutely, and incontestably kindred with the poems, which they cannot deny to it, stands forth as clear as the daylight. The associate fact that the plays contain precisely such errors as would naturally be made by the untutored Shakspere, but could not possibly be made by the thoroughly taught and erudite Bacon, is likewise distinctly visible. Yet, all the same—because Shakspere, like Burns, sprung from a family in humble station, and was but poorly schooled—this preposterous doctrine persistently rears its foolish head, and insults with idle chatter the Shaksperean scholarship of the world. Only a few weeks ago a prominent representative dramatist of the day had the astounding folly to announce an hypothesis—apparently intended to be taken in earnest—that Shakspere's tragedy of "Hamlet" was written by Jonson, Webster, Dekker, and Alleyne, in conjunction with Shakspere, and under his supervision; a doctrine which, to any student acquainted with those writers and their times, is pitiable in its silliness. For if there be in literature any work which, from the first line to the last, and in every word and syllable of it, bears the authentic pressure of one creative and predominant mind—the broad-headed arrow of imperial dominion—that work is "Hamlet." Shakspere's style, once known, can never be mistaken. No man of his time, with the single exception of John Fletcher, could write in anything like his peculiar strain of simplicity and power. In some of the historical plays there are traces of collaboration—as all readers know; but in his greater plays the only hand that is visible is the hand of Shakspere.

This is especially true of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and probably no better mental exercise than the analysis of the style and spirit and component elements of this piece could be devised for those persons—if any such there be—who incline to entertain either the Bacon theory or the collaboration theory of the authorship of Shakspere. Bacon, if his avowed writings may be taken as the denotement of his mind, could no more have written this play than he could have flown on wings of tissue-paper over the spire of old St. Paul's; nor does it exhibit the slightest deviation from one invariable poetic mind and temperament. Shakspere's fancy takes a free range here, and revels in beauty and joy. The Dream was first published in 1600; the earliest allusion made to it is that of Francis Meres, in his "Palladis Tamia," in 1598; and probably it was written as early as 1594, when Shakspere was thirty years old. A significant reference to the subject of it occurs in the second scene of the second act of the "Comedy of Errors" (1589-'91), which has been thought to indicate that the poet had already considered and, perhaps, conceived it; he was working with wise and incessant industry at that time, and the amazing fertility of his creative genius was beginning to reveal itself. The Dream is absolutely of his own invention. The names of the characters, together with a few incidents, he derived from Plutarch, Ovid, and Chaucer—authors with whom he shows himself to have been acquainted. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe occurs in Ovid, and a translation of that Latin poet, made by Arthur Golding, was current in Shakspere's day. It is thought that the "Knight's Tale" and "Tysbe of Babylone," by Chaucer, may have been the means of suggesting this play to Shakspere, but his story and his characters are his own. And although, as Dr. Johnson observes, fairies were in his time fashionable, and Spenser's poem ("The Faerie Queene") had made them great, Shakspere was the first to interblend them with the proceedings of mortals in a drama. The text of this piece is considered to be exceptionally free from error or any sort of defect. Two editions of the Dream, quarto, appeared in 1600—one published by Thomas Fisher, bookseller; the other by James Roberts, printer. The Fisher publication had been entered at Stationers' Hall, October 8, that year, and probably it was sanctioned by the author. The two editions do not materially differ, and the modern Shaksperean editors have made a judicious use of both in their choice of the text. The play was not again printed until 1623, when it appeared in the first Folio. . . .

In the first Folio (1623) the Dream occupies eighteen pages, from page 145 to page 162 inclusive, in the section devoted to comedies—the Acts, but not the Scenes, being distinguished. The editors of that Folio, Heminge and Condell, followed the text of the Roberts Quarto. The memory of one of the actors who appeared in the Dream in its earliest days is curiously preserved in a stage-direction, printed in the First Folio, in Act v. Sc. i.: "Tawyer with a trumpet." The piece, of course, appears in the later folios,—1632, 1664, and 1685. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was popular in Shakspere's own time. Mention of it, as impliedly a play in general knowledge and acceptance, was made by Taylor, the Water Poet, in 1622.

A piece called "The Fairy Queen," being Shakspere's comedy, with music by Purcell, was published in London in 1692. It had been acted there at the Haymarket—the presentation being made with rich dresses, fine scenery, and elaborate mechanism. There is another old piece, called "The Merry-Conceited Humours of Bottom the Weaver." This was made out of an episode in the Dream, and it is included in the collection of farces attributed to Robert Cox, a comedian of the time of Charles the First, published in 1672. A comic masque, by Richard Leveridge, similarly derived, entitled "Pyramus and Thisbe," was performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, and was published in 1716. Two other musical farces, with this same title and origin, are recorded—one by Mr. Lampe, acted at Covent Garden, and published in 1745; the other by W. C. Oulton, acted at Birmingham, and published in 1798. Garrick made an acting-copy of "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—adding to the text as well as curtailing it, and introducing songs—and this was played at Drury Lane, where it failed, and was published in 1763. Colman reduced Garrick's piece to two acts, and called it "A Fairy Tale," and in this form it was tried at Drury Lane, and published in 1764 and 1777. Colman, however, wrote: "I was little more than a godfather on the occasion, and the alterations should have been subscribed Anon."

The best production of this comedy ever accomplished on the English stage was that effected by Charles Kean, at the Princess's Theatre, London,—managed by him from August, 1850, till August 29, 1859.

The first performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" ever given in America occurred at the old Park Theatre, for the benefit of Mrs. Hilson, on November 9, 1826. Mr. Ireland, in his valuable Records, has preserved a part of the cast, rescued from a mutilated copy of the play-bill of that night: "Theseus," Mr. Lee; "Bottom," Mr. Hilson; "Snout," Mr. Placide; "Oberon," Mr. Peter Richings; "Puck," Mrs. Hilson; "Titania," Mrs. Sharpe; "Hippolita," Mrs. Stickney; "Hermia," Mrs. Hackett. On August 30, 1841, the comedy was again revived at this theatre, with a cast that included Mr. Fredericks as "Theseus," Mr. W. H. Williams as "Bottom," Mrs. Knight as "Puck," Charlotte Cushman as "Oberon," Mary Taylor as "Titania," Susan Cushman as "Helena," Mrs. Groves as "Hippolita," Miss Buloid (afterward Mrs. Abbott), as "Hermia," William Wheatley as "Lysander," C. W. Clarke as "Demetrius," Mr. Bellamy as "Egeus," and Mr. Fisher (not Charles), as "Quince." It kept the stage only one week. The next revivals came on February 3 and 6, 1854, at Burton's Theatre and at the Broadway Theatre, rival houses. The parts were cast as follows:

	At Broadway.	At Burton's.
Theseus	F. B. Conway	Charles Fisher.
Lysander	Lannergan	George Jordan.
Demetrius	Grosvenor	W. H. Norton.
Egeus	Matthews	Moore.
Bottom	William Davidge	W. E. Burton.
Quince	Howard	T. Johnson.
Flute	Whiting	G. Barrett.
Snug	Fisk	Russell.
Snout	Henry	G. Andrews.
Starveling	Cutter	Paul.
Puck	Miss Viola Crocker	Mast. Parsloe.
Oberon	Mme. Ponisi	Miss E. Raymond
Titania	Mrs. Abbott	Mrs. Burton.
Hippolita	Mrs. Warren	Mrs. J. Cooke.
Hermia	Mrs. Nagle	Mrs. Hough.
Helena	Miss A. Gougenheim	Mrs. Buckland.

Great stress, in both cases, was laid upon Mendelssohn's music. At each house it ran for a month. It was not revived in New-York again until April 18, 1859, when Laura Keene brought it forward at her theatre, and kept it on till May 28, with C. W. Couldock as "Theseus," William Rufus Blake as "Bottom," Miss Macarthy as "Oberon," Miss Stevens as "Helena," Miss Ada Clifton as "Hermia," and herself as "Puck." It was a failure. Even Blake failed as "Bottom"—the most acute critic of that period (Edward G. P. Wilkins), describing the performance as "not funny, not even grotesque, but vulgar and unpleasant." Charles Peters was good as "Thisbe." The stage-version used was made by R. G. White. This same theatre subsequently became the Olympic (not Mitchell's, but the second of that name), and here, on October 28, 1867, under the management of Mr. James E. Hayes and the direction of Joseph Jefferson, who had brought over from London a fine Grecian panorama by Telbin, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was again offered, with a cast that included G. L. Fox as "Bottom," W. Davidge as "Quince," Owen Marlowe as "Flute," Cornelia Jefferson as "Titania," Clara Fisher as "Peasblossom," Miss Fanny Stockton as "Oberon," Miss Alice Harrison as a "Fairy," Master Willie Young as "Puck," Mr. Harry Wall as "Theseus," Mr. J. J. Wallace as "Demetrius," Mr. J. Franks as "Lysander," Mr. T. J. Hind as "Egeus," Mrs. Edmonds as "Hippolita," Mrs. Wallace as "Hermia," Miss Louisa Hawthorne as "Helena," Mr. M. Quinlan as "Stout," Mr. C. K. Fox as "Snug," Mr. J. B. Howland as "Starveling," and Miss Vincent, Miss Howard, Miss Thomas, and Miss Le Brun as "Fairies." Telbin's panorama, a magnificent work, displayed the country supposed to lie between Athens and the forest wherein the Fairy Queen and the lovers are enchanted and bewitched and the sapient "Bottom" is "translated." Fox undertook "Bottom," for the first time, and he was drolly consequential and stolidly conceited in it. Landseer's famous picture of "Titania" and the ass-headed "Bottom" was well copied, in one of the scenes. Mr. Hayes provided a gorgeous tableau at the close. Mendelssohn's music was played and sung, with excellent skill and effect—the chief vocalist being Clara Fisher. Owen Marlowe as "Thisbe" gave a burlesque of the manner of Rachel. The comedy, as then given, ran for one hundred nights—from October 28, 1867, till February 1, 1868. The stage-version used was that of Charles Kean.

The next production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was effected by Augustin Daly at the Grand Opera House, on August 19, 1873. The scenery then employed, especially a woodland painted by Mr. G. Heister, was of extraordinary beauty—delicate in color, sensuous in feeling, sprightly in fancy. Mr. Fox again played "Bottom"; Miss Fanny Kemp Bowler appeared as "Oberon," Miss Fay Templeton as "Puck," Miss Fanny Hayward (Stocqueler) as "Titania," Miss Nina Varian as "Helena," Miss Adelaide Lennox as "Hermia," Miss M. Chambers as "Hippolita," Mr. M. A. Kennedy as "Theseus," Mr. D. H. Harkins as "Lysander," Mr. James Taylor as "Demetrius," and Mr. Frank Hardenburgh as "Egeus." The piece ran three weeks.

The attentive reader of this stage-version, made by Mr. Daly, will observe that much illustrative stage-business has been introduced by him, which is new and effective. The disposition of the groups at the start is fresh, and so is the treatment of the quarrel between "Oberon" and "Titania," with disappearance of the Indian child. The moonlight effects, in the transition from act second to act third, and the gradual assembly of goblins and fairies in the shadowy mists through which the fire-flies glimmer, at the close of act third, are novel and beautiful. Cuts and transpositions have been made at the end of the fourth act, in order to close it with the voyage of the barge of "Theseus," through a summer landscape, on the silver stream that ripples down to Athens. The third act has been judiciously compressed, so that the spectator may not see too much of the perplexed and wrangling lovers. Only a few changes have been made, and those only such as are absolutely essential. But little of the original text has been omitted. The music for the choruses has been selected from various English composers; that of Mendelssohn is used only in the orchestra. It is upon the strength of the comedy, and not upon the incidental music, that reliance has been placed, in effecting this revival. The accepted doctrine of traditional criticism—a doctrine made seemingly potent by reiteration—that "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is not for the stage, need not necessarily be considered final. Hazlitt was the first to insist on that idea. "Poetry and the stage," said that great writer, "do not agree well together. The attempt to reconcile them, in this instance, fails not only of effect, but of decorum. The ideal can have no place upon the stage, which is a picture without perspective. The imagination cannot sufficiently qualify the actual impression of the senses." But this is only saying that there are difficulties. The remark applies to all the higher forms of dramatic literature; and, logically, if this doctrine were observed in practice, none of the great plays would be attempted. "A Midsummer Night's Dream," with all its ideal spirit, is essentially dramatic; it ought not to be lost to the stage; and to some extent, certainly, the difficulties can be surmounted. In the spirit of a dream the play was written, and in the spirit of a dream it can be acted.

The student of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," as often as he thinks upon this lofty and lovely expression of a most luxuriant and happy poetic fancy, must necessarily find himself impressed with its exquisite purity of spirit, its affluence of invention, its extraordinary wealth of contrasted characters, its absolute symmetry of form, and its great beauty of poetic diction. The essential, wholesome cleanliness and sweetness of Shakspere's mind, unaffected by the gross animalism of his times, appear conspicuously in this play. No single trait of the piece impresses the reader more agreeably than its frank display of the spontaneous, natural, and entirely delightful exultation of "Theseus" and "Hippolita" in their approaching nuptials. They are grand creatures both, and they rejoice in each other and in their perfectly accordant love. Nowhere in Shakspere is there a more imperial man than "Theseus"; nor, despite her feminine impatience of dulness, a woman more beautiful and more essentially woman-like than "Hippolita." It is thought that the immediate impulse of this comedy, in Shakspere's mind, was the marriage of his friend and benefactor, the Earl of Southampton, with Elizabeth Vernon—which, while it did not in fact occur till 1598, was very likely agreed upon, and had received Queen Elizabeth's sanction, as early as 1594-'95. In old English literature it is seen that such a theme often proved suggestive of ribaldry; but Shakspere could preserve the sanctity even while he revelled in the passionate ardor of love, and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," while it possesses all the rosy glow, the physical thrill, and the melting tenderness of such pieces as Herrick's "Nuptiall Song," is likewise fraught with all the moral elevation and unaffected chastity of such pieces as Milton's "Comus." Human nature is shown in it as feeling no shame in its elemental and rightful passions, and as having no reason to feel ashamed of them. The atmosphere is free and bracing; the tone honest; the [illegible] likewise, the fertility and felicity of the poet's invention—intertwining the loves of earthly sovereigns and of their subjects with the dissensions of fairy monarchs, the pranks of mischievous elves, the protective care of attendant sprites, and the comic but kind-hearted and well-meant fealty of boorish peasants—arouse lively interest and keep it steadily alert. In no other of his works has Shakspere more brilliantly shown that complete dominance of theme which is manifested in the perfect preservation of proportion. The strands of action are braided with astonishing grace. The fourfold story is never allowed to lapse into dulness or obscurity. There is caprice, but no distortion. The supernatural machinery is never wrested toward the production of startling or monstrous effects, but it deftly impels each mortal personage in the natural line of human development. The dream-spirit is maintained throughout, and perhaps it is for this reason—that the poet was living and thinking and writing in the free, untrammelled world of his own spacious and airy imagination, and not in any definite sphere of this earth—that "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is so radically superior to the other comedies written by him at about the same period, "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," "The Comedy of Errors," "Love's Labor's Lost," and "The Taming of the Shrew." His genius overflows in this piece, and the rich excess of it is seen in passages of the most exquisite poetry—such as the beautiful speeches of "Titania" and "Oberon," in the second act—over against which is set that triumph of humor, that immortal Interlude of "Pyramus and Thisbe," which is the father of all the burlesques in our language, and which, for freshness, pungency of apposite satire, and general applicability to the foible of self-love in human nature, and to ignorance and folly in human affairs, might have been written yesterday. The only faults in this play are a slight tinge of monotony in the third act, concerning the lovers in the wood, and an excess of rhymed passages in the text throughout. Shakspere had not yet cast aside that custom of rhyme which was in vogue when he came first upon the scene. But these defects are trifles. The beauties overwhelm them. It would take many pages to enumerate and fitly to descant on the felicities of literature that we owe to this comedy—gems such as the famous passage on "the course of true love"; the regal picture of Queen Elizabeth as "a fair vestal throned by the west"; the fine description of the stormy summer (that of 1594 in England, according to Stowe's Chronicle and Dr. Simon Forman's Diary); the vision of "Titania" asleep upon the bank of wild thyme, oxlips, and violets; the eloquent contrasts of lover, madman, and poet, each subdued and impelled by that "strong imagination" which "bodies forth the forms of things unknown"; and the wonderfully spirited lines on the hounds of Sparta, "with ears that swept away the morning dew." In character likewise, and in those salutary lessons which the truthful portraiture of character invariably teaches, this piece is exceptionally strong. "Helena," noble and loving, yet a little perverted from true dignity by her sexual infatuation; "Hermia," shrewish and violent, despite her feminine sweetness, and possibly because of her impetuous and clinging ardor; "Demetrius" and "Lysander," each selfish and fierce in his love, but manly, straightforward fellows, abounding more in youth and desire than in brains; "Bottom," the quintessence of bland, unconscious egotism and self-conceit; and "Theseus," the princely gentleman and typical ruler—these make up, assuredly, one of the most interesting and significant groups that can be found in fiction. The self-centred nature, the broad-minded view, the magnanimous spirit, the calm adequacy, the fine and high manner of "Theseus," make this character alone the inspiration of the comedy and a most potent lesson upon the conduct of life. Through certain of his people—such as "Ulysses" in "Troilus and Cressida," the "Duke" in "Measure for Measure," and "Prospero" in "The Tempest"—the voice of Shakspere himself, speaking personally, is clearly heard; and it is heard also in "Theseus." "The best in this kind are but shadows," says this wise observer of life, when he comes to speak of the actors who copy it, "and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them." There is no higher strain of prince-like courtesy and considerate grace, even in the perfect breeding of "Hamlet," than is visible in the preference of "Theseus" for the play of the hard-handed men of Athens:

"And what poor duty cannot do
Noble respect takes it in might, not merit.
For never anything can be amiss
When simpleness and duty tender it."

With reference to the question of suitable method in the acting of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," it may be observed that too much stress can scarcely be laid upon the fact that this comedy was conceived and written absolutely in the spirit of a dream. It ought not, therefore, to be treated as a rational manifestation of orderly design. It possesses, indeed, a coherent and symmetrical plot and a definite purpose; but, while it moves toward a final result of absolute order, it presupposes intermediary progress through a realm of motley shapes and fantastic vision. Its persons are creatures of the fancy, and all effort to make them solidly actual, to set them firmly upon the earth, and to accept them as realities of common life, is labor ill-bestowed. . . .

To body forth the form of things is, in this case, manifestly, a difficult task; and yet the true course is obvious. Actors who yield themselves to the spirit of whim, and drift along with it, using a delicate method and avoiding insistence upon prosy realism, will succeed with this piece—provided, also, that their audience can be fanciful, and can accept the performance, not as a comedy of ordinary life, but as a vision seen in a dream. The play is full of intimations that this was Shakspere's mood. Even "Bottom," the consummate flower of unconscious humor, is at his height of significance in his moment of supreme illusion: "I have had a dream,—past the wit of man to say what dream it was:—Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had——. But man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was." The whole philosophy of the subject, comically stated, is here. A serious statement of it is in the words of the poet Campbell:

"Well may sleep present us fictions,
Since our waking moments teem
With such fanciful convictions
As make life itself a dream."

Various actors in the past—although "A Midsummer Night's Dream" has not had great currency upon the stage, at any period, whether in England or America—have laid a marked stress upon the character of "Bottom." Samuel Phelps, upon the London stage, was esteemed excellent in it. He acted the part in his own production of the Dream, at Sadler's Wells, and he again acted it in 1870 at the Queen's Theatre, in Long Acre—now demolished. On the American stage, William E. Burton was accounted wonderfully good in it. "As Mr. Burton renders the character," says Richard Grant White, "its traits are brought out with a delicate and masterly hand; its humor is exquisite." And Mr. William L. Keese, in his careful and very serviceable biography of Burton, makes equally cordial reference to this achievement of the great comedian: "How striking it was in sustained individuality, and how finely exemplified was the potential vanity of 'Bottom!' What pleased us greatly was the vein of engaging raillery which ran through the delivery of his speeches to the fairies." Burton produced the Dream at his own theatre, in 1854, with such wealth of fine scenery as in those days was accounted prodigious. The most notable impersonation of "Bottom" that has been given here since Burton's time was, probably, that of the late George L. Fox—already mentioned in this preface. Self-conceit, as the essence of the character, was thoroughly well understood and expressed by him. He wore the ass's head, but he did not know that he was wearing it; and when, afterward, the vague sense of it came upon him for an instant, he put it by as something inconceivable and intolerable. His "Not a word of me!"—spoken to the other hard-handed men of Athens, after his return to them out of the enchanted "palace wood"—was, perhaps, his finest single point. Certainly it expressed to the utmost the colossal self-love and swelling pomposity of this miracle of bland and opaque sapience. But Fox was stronger in pantomime than in a consistent character of sustained comedy. The essential need of acting, in a portrayal of this play, is whimsicality—but it must be whimsicality exalted by poetry.

WILLIAM WINTER.

GRUDGING THE GIFT.

From The Washington Critic.

A new Congressman made his first and only society call yesterday. He got along all right until he came to be introduced.

"Let me present you to the hostess," said his companion, starting into the room.

"Not much," he exclaimed, pulling back; "I'll be blamed if I'm going to be given away in a crowd like that," and he rushed out and escaped.